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ABSTRACT

The Community College of Vermont (CCV) does not have a campus library, but supports its programs with library services offered at 12 different sites within the state. The 12 sites, which were begun in spring 1985, each have a 500-volume non-circulating reference collection, with a special emphasis on business and human services materials to match program needs. Specialized collections in such areas as adult education, science, fine arts, Vermont history, sign language, cultural anthropology, and psychology, are circulated on a rotating basis among sites. The site libraries serve as research skills laboratories, helping students to begin their research by becoming familiar with reference materials, the card catalog, and various indexes. The college provides direct reference service to a community of students and instructors scattered throughout the state via a Wide Area Telecommunications Service (WATS) line installed into the office of CCV's library coordinator. Each of the site offices is equipped with the hardware and software to access the Instructional Resource and Information System (IRIS), a newly developed computer program designed to assist CCV instructors in sharing successful and exciting teaching techniques, classroom materials, exercises, books, videos, films, journal articles, and guest speakers. It is no easy task to provide library services to students in a non-campus setting. CCV relies heavily on telecommunications, computers, and cooperation with other libraries and institutions to accomplish this task. (EJV)

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Off-Campus Library Services: Community College of Vermont

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Off-Campus Library Services Community College of Vermont

Eileen Chalfoun

Community College of Vermont

"The role of the library within a college or university can be understood only in the context of the institution's philosophy of education (Princeton Alumni Weekly, April 23, 1986, p. 6). While this may be true of most libraries in general, it deserves special attention at a school like Community College of Vermont. At the heart of the college's philosophy of education is the concept of the Self-Reliant Learner. Students are constantly encouraged to assess their educational needs, plan ways to address those needs, implement plans and evaluate the success of completed learning activities. The role of its library must be a flexible and dynamic one in response to the needs of students who are designing individual degree plans.

Community College of Vermont does not have a campus library, but rather provides library services for programs offered at twelve different sites within the state. (see p. 128 of The Off-Campus Library Services Conference II, 1985, for complete data.) It is one of five state colleges who have been involved in a joint planning process for library development since fall 1982. As a non-campus institution the college has had to rely heavily on the cooperative planning efforts of member colleges in order to improve access to materials and services traditionally found in campus libraries. Accessing those research materials in a variety of ways has inspired the college staff to use modern information technology in implementing its long-range development plan.

In its report of July 1984 all of the five state colleges in Vermont adopted the following goal statement: "A student, by the time he or she completes a VSC degree program, should be able to make efficient and effective use of library/information resources and personnel in the identification and procurement of material to meet an information need." (Report of the Task Force on Library Development, July 1984, p. 3.) It has become the task of Community College of Vermont to help its students and instructors access the information they find necessary for their individual degree programs.

The college has adopted its own set of objectives designed to help students achieve their library goal. Their degree plans should show evidence that they can:

develop appropriate topics or questions as a basis for their research;

locate, organize, and use resource materials such as catalogs, bibliographies, indexes, abstracts, computer data bases, and Biblio-tech (CCV handbook of research skills for use both in and out of the library);

gather and assess research data;

report research results in a variety of formats and set up a research paper in correct form using an outline, footnotes, and a bibliography. (Steps To Degree Planning, 1985, p. 25.)

The planning process for curriculum and collection development involves the whole college community. Students, instructors, and Coordinators of Instruction funnel their suggestions for print and non-print materials to the Coordinator of Research and Information Services and the Instructional Resources Committee. Recommendations are reviewed and researched for quality and applicability to the college's curriculum; materials are then acquired for site collections.

The twelve site collections were begun in the spring of 1985, and further developed during the following year bringing the volume total to approximately 6,000 (about 500 per site office). They may be generally described as reference collections covering all sections of the Dewey classification system with special emphasis on business and human service materials to match program needs. With the exception of specialized materials, these are non-circulating collections. Specialized collections to be circulated on a rotating basis among sites include: adult education, science, fine arts, Vermont history, sign language, cultural anthropology, and psychology. Each site receives subscriptions to general subject and business journal indexes. Non-print materials accessed through I.R.I.S., the college's computer index, are housed in all sites.

The collections are not mini-libraries designed to fill all the research needs of students. They could be described as laboratories for the acquisition of library/research skills. The college still maintains formal relationships with local public libraries, regional public libraries, and other academic institutions for borrowing books through inter-library loan. The site libraries help students to begin their research by becoming familiar with reference materials and by learning how to use a card catalog and various indexes. In short they serve as the classroom centers for bibliographic instruction.

In order to provide direct reference service to a community of students and instructors scattered throughout the state, the college has installed a WATS line into the office of its library coordinator. This line enables students to obtain reference assistance from any location within the state without direct cost to them. The system has been used experimentally for a year and has gained praise from librarians at other Vermont colleges as a distinct benefit to students studying at a distance from a college campus. Another service which the college provides is telefacsimile transmission of information from its three regional offices (Brattleboro, Montpelier, Winooski). Students are able to use serials' indexes in each of the twelve site offices, and request articles located in any of the four state college libraries. During its first semester of operation, approximately 200 requests were made to VSC libraries for information, and print materials were delivered to students for research purposes, again, at no direct cost to them. This service is part of the continuing effort toward library cooperation among the five state colleges.

According to ACRL standards, the college ought to have three professionals working in its library system. (An Evaluative Checklist for Reviewing a College Library Program, 1979. p. 316). Currently, the college employs one professional reference librarian with the title "Coordinator of Research and Information Services" and one half-time receptionist/clerk-typist, both housed in the Brattleboro site office. In spring of 1986 a recommendation was made to add the services of one half-time reference librarian to serve the northern part of the state, and one half-time technical services librarian to assist with cataloging and classifying the college's non-print materials. Clearly, there is a need for more professional help in providing library services to over 2,000 students each semester.

A brief summary of the functions of the Coordinator of Research and Information Services for the college appears in the VSC's classification handbook:

> The Coordinator of Research & Information Services provides information and research support services integral to the college curriculum. This includes management of the instructional resources network of a non-campus institution which consists of reference libraries in each site office, a computer resource network, and inter-library loan activities. The Coordinator acts as a liaison between the college and the Vermont State College's library projects and personnel.

> Responsibilities include: advising and instructing students, instructors and field staff in the use of the college's computer resource network as well as other instructional media; developing the college's print and non-print collection; selecting and recommending materials to be purchased or discarded. The Coordinator performs traditional and on-line searches, manages the processing of library/ media materials, and participates in program development. The Coordinator provides assistance to VSC students and instructors participating in off-campus programs in the vicinity of Community College of Vermont site offices.

As the college continues to grow and expand its library services, a number of these responsibilities will need to be divided among other staff members in various parts of the state. Hopefully, modern communications technology will aid the college in this redistribution process.

I.R.I.S. (Instructional Resource and Information System) is a newly developed computer program designed to assist CCV instructors in sharing successful and exciting teaching techniques, classroom materials, exercises, books, videos, films, filmstrips, journal articles, bibliographies, guest speakers. Each site office is equipped with a computer and software to enable instructors to access information at their convenience. All staff and instructors are invited to contribute information about materials which they have successfully used in classes. These are reviewed by the Instructional Resources Committee, and systematically entered into the program for college-wide use. Information can be accessed in a variety of ways: title, author, title key word, LC subject, course title/number, type of media.

CCV does not have a traditional faculty. Courses at the College are taught by independent contractors recruited by Coordinators of Instruction and Advisement, and hired by the College through the regional directors. There are problems associated with the large teacher turnover in the college each semester--approximately 40%. Using I.R.I.S. has proved a useful way to provide the continual stream of new teachers with materials and methods in a systematic and convenient way, and to help them lose the sense of isolation working in a non-campus institution.

Of special use for research purposes is the bibliographic instruction manual, Biblio-tech, planned and written by CCV staff in 1985 especially for students in a non-campus setting. All students are encouraged to purchase their own copy of the manual

to help them with degree planning, and with courses having a research component. A sample of the kind of information the manual contains is clearly shown in its table of contents: Retrieving and Using Information, Helpful Hints for Conducting Research, Information Search Strategies, Library Resources, Interlibrary Loan, Computers in the Library, Catalogs, Reference Departments, Government Documents, Research Guides and Handbooks, Research Terminology, Library Research Facilities in Vermont. The manual has been enthusiastically received by librarians and faculty in other off-campus settings who are trying to provide services similar to CCV's. It is addressed to students, and allows them to follow the steps to doing careful research without the strict guidance of an instructor.

Library training of staff and students has been largely the domain of the Coordinator of Research & Information Services. During the academic year orientations and workshops are held in site offices. Specific courses in research and writing are listed in the college catalog and arranged for students, and staff development days are held on a yearly basis. Coordinators work with instructors to incorporate research objectives into course descriptions, and plan formal library instruction periods for students each semester. Bibliographic instruction remains the largest goal in our program, but the logistics of providing quality instruction state-wide each semester are complicated. Trying to use modern technology without sacrificing the values of close human interaction has always presented an interesting challenge for the non-campus college community, and CCV continues to experiment with ways of providing information electronically without sacrificing those values.

Until three years ago there was very little resource sharing or cooperative collection development among the Vermont State Colleges Libraries. Interlibrary loan was available through the Vermont Department of Libraries and most often took from two to three weeks for delivery of books. Times have changed dramatically and 1986 finds all five of the state colleges working together on the tasks of collection development, a joint serials list, increased use of online searching, retrospective conversion, a joint online catalog, and a common policy for online searches.

The decision has been made to combine the state college catalogs into a single online system which will be made available to off-campus and non-campus students and faculty. There will be one point of access for all VSC holdings and electronic mail capability within the system for ordering materials. Obviously, the benefits to Community College of Vermont will be enormous.

For the first time in the history of the College students will be able to access the VSC catalog from any site office, then request and receive materials directly. It is expected that this project will be implemented by the spring of 1987, and ready for use by CCV students and staff by fall of 1987.

It is no easy task to provide library service and instruction to students in a non-campus setting. Community College of Vermont has been in the vanguard of institutions trying to create "electronic libraries" which rely heavily on telecommunications and computers to accomplish this task. However, providing electronic access to materials does not guarantee satisfied library users. (Brown, 1985). Users need training and a well-organized library instruction program to become good researchers . With continued support from the Vermont State Colleges, increased staffing, and vigorous academic and financial planning, Community College will continue to develop ways to provide that training and library service. It will continue to strive toward national recognition for some of its experimental library programs, and to work toward improving its electronic networking services. The key to success in this delivery system is cooperation, and it is hoped that everyone involved in the library planning process throughout the state will remain deeply committed to working together effectively to provide library assistance to all VSC students.

In the U.S. Department of Education's report entitled Alliance for Excellence: Librarians Respond to a Nation At Risk, recommendations in support of the learning society include the need to: "improve service to people of all ages; strengthen research; expand resource sharing in support of lifelong learning; and refine the educational preparation of library and information professionals in order that they may work more effectively." (Annual Report, 1983-84). These are the goals Community College strives for in the state of Vermont,and the reasons it remains committed to strengthening the network of library and information service within the area.

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